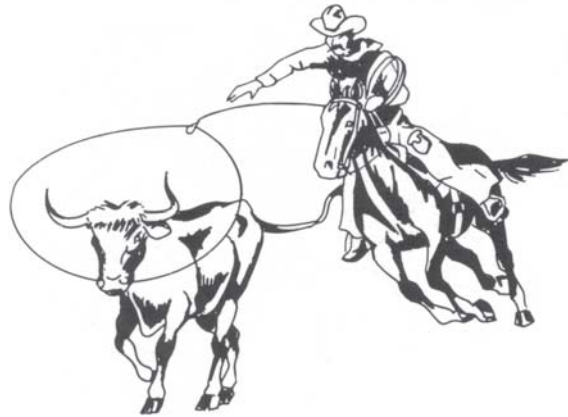




Cowboys

Suggested Pre-visit Activities

These activities are tied into the Missouri, Illinois, and national standards for Social Studies and Language Arts.



Lesson Overview

Students will begin their study of the nineteenth century cowboy by exploring their image of this popular western figure.

Objectives

Students who participate in this activity(ies) will be able to:

- Compare and contrast their image of the nineteenth century cowboy with others in their class
- Understand how the media, such as movies, books, television, shape their image of the American cowboy.
- Understand the origin of the nineteenth century cowboy.

Historical Background

The legend of the American cowboy is recognizable around the globe in many forms. It has found its way into the hearts and media of many cultures and has become a basic component of American mythology. Its impact on music, fashion, speech, art and the onetime national attitude to “go west” is easy to document.

What is not as clear, or as well remembered, are the true origins and development of this group. A phenomenon that lasted only thirty years (in the late 1800s), traces its roots to Columbus’ arrival in the western hemisphere. In 1493, on his second voyage to the “New World” Columbus brought cattle to stock the ranches which the Spanish had established in what is now Santo Domingo and settlements in Cuba. Later Spanish ships brought more cattle. As the Spanish moved north into Mexico the cattle went with them. By the late seventeenth century the Spanish were moving farther north into Texas, establishing missions, in the hope of spreading Christianity among the American Indians. The missions, which needed some form of income, found cattle ranging very profitable. They raised large herds not only for their meat but also for their hides and tallow. The missions recruited and hired local American Indians to help them take care of the large herds. The American Indians came to be known as vaqueros from the Spanish word *vaca* meaning cow.

The cattle, which were allowed to roam across the open grasslands, multiplied quickly. Many of them wandered away from the care of the mission and became wild. After Mexico won its independence from Spain in 1821, U.S. citizens filtered into Texas, bringing with them their own cattle, which were mostly English breeds. The blending of the Spanish and English breeds resulted in the Longhorn. The wild herds of Longhorn continued to grow. After the Texas Revolution in 1836, the wild herds were an easy way for veterans and other adventurous settlers to establish their own ranches. All they needed was a rope and a branding iron.

Cattle ranching continued to be a major business in what is now Texas, but suffered its ups and downs. The Mexican War and annexation of Texas to the United States in 1845 disrupted the industry. Over the years cattlemen made the best of fluctuating prices. In the years just prior to the Civil War (1861-1865), some even began looking for distant markets. The Civil War, which halted U.S. expansion and growth for four years also halted the cattle industry in Texas, but not the growth of the herds.

After the war much of the south was devastated, including Texas. Homes and property had been lost and jobs were hard to find. Many of the returning cattlemen found themselves having to round up the herds dispersed during the war. For some unemployed yet adventurous veterans, the large number of now wild cattle presented them with an opportunity to round up a herd and establish their own ranch. Texas ranching was once again in full operation. The question then was, were there enough markets to make the business profitable? The answer was found in the northeastern part of the United States. During the war that area had depleted its supply of beef and was now in desperate need of cattle. The southern ranchers knew if they could get their cattle to those markets they could certainly make a profit.

The easiest way to move cattle to the Northeast was via the railroads. But railroads had not yet reached every section of the country, so this meant trailing the herds to the railheads in Kansas and Missouri. This need among the cattle ranchers resulted in a mass hiring of young men willing to take on the job of herding cattle from Texas to the railheads. The men needed to be young because

the job required strength and stamina. Fortunately for the ranchers, young veteran soldiers and newly-freed slaves, both looking for jobs, fit the bill. Thus began the “golden age” of the cowboy.

Unfortunately for those yearning to ride the open range, it was a short-lived era. By the 1890s, the expansion of the railroads into Texas replaced the need for long trail drives. Cowboys continued to work on ranches and open public lands in the west, but the classic cowboy era had ended.

Nevertheless, our love affair with the cowboy as a folk hero continues. For some, keeping in touch with the mythological image created by the media and even historians is enough. For others, digging deeper into the real cowboy, his background, his personality, his daily activities and tasks is an ongoing project. Ongoing research has brought to light a more prominent role on the ranching frontier for African Americans, Hispanics, and American Indians of the period.

Being a cowboy was a hard and dangerous job, but one that offered adventure and excitement. The following activities provide an introduction into the reality of riding the trail.

Vocabulary

bandanna - a large colorful handkerchief, usually with a pattern printed on. Bandannas are usually worn around the neck or head.

brand - a mark burned on the skin with a hot iron. Brands are put on cattle to show ownership.

cattle - animals of the cow family that are raised on farms and ranches, as cows, bulls, steers, and oxen.

chaps - leather coverings worn over the legs of trousers by cowboys to protect their legs from thorny bushes.

chuck - cowboy slang for food.

chuckwagon - a wagon with kitchen equipment for serving food to cowboys or other outdoor workers.

cookie - the name given the chuckwagon cook.

corral - a place fenced in for holding horses, cattle, sheep, etc.

frontier - the part of a settled country that lies next to a region that is still a wilderness.

immigrant - a person who comes into a foreign country to make a new home.

lasso - a long rope with a running knot that tightens as the rope is pulled, used to catch horses, cattle or other livestock.

longhorn - a breed of cattle with long horns, raised in the southwest.

media - refers to means of communication such as radio, TV, newspapers, movies, books, etc.

maverick - an animal, especially a lost calf, that had not been branded.

myth - any story that was made up and did not really happen; any imaginary person or thing.

railheads - a railroad depot at which supplies are unloaded to be distributed or forwarded by truck or other means.

spurs - a metal device with sharp points, worn on the heel by horsemen to urge the horse forward.

tallow - fat obtained from parts of the bodies of cattle, sheep, or horses, and used in foodstuffs or to make candles, leather dressing, soap, and lubricants.

trail boss - the man hired to take charge of the men and the cattle during a trail drive.

wrangler - the member of a trail drive who was responsible for caring for the horses.

Suggested Pre-Visit Activity

In the movies, cowboys seem to spend a lot of time chasing outlaws and battling Indians, when in reality cowboys spent their days tending and herding cattle. Use the questions below to find out what your students know about cowboys. Do their representations reflect myth or reality?

When you think of a cowboy, what are some things that come to mind?

How old were most cowboys?

What skills did a cowboy need to do his job?

List three things a cowboy did as a part of his job.

Cowboys spent much of their time on trail drives. Describe in your own words what a trail drive is.

Would you have made a good cowboy? why or why not?

Do you think there are still cowboys today?

Extension Activities

Just as the cowboy trade began in Mexico many of the words we associate with that lifestyle originated in the Spanish culture. Listed below are some of the original Spanish words used by the early vaqueros. See if your students can recognize the English version. The answers are found at the bottom of the page.

la chapparera el rancho el lazo la estampida

Listed below are more English words with Spanish origins.

alligator	from el lagarto, the lizard
bronco	wild or rough
cafeteria	coffee shop
cargo	cargar, to load
comrade	camarada, old Spanish for roommate
mustang	mestengo, a stray animal
patio	Spanish for courtyard
renegade	renegado, deserter or outlaw
tornado	tornar, to turn

Words with the same meaning in both languages include: **aficianado, armada, barracuda, mosquito, tobacco, vanilla.**

Answers:

la chapparera - chaps **el rancho** - ranch **el lazo** - lasso **la estampida** - stampede

The entries on the following page come from books based on material received through interviews with cowboys and cattle people. Either in small groups or as a class, read the quotes and discuss them for context, content, and emotion. Use the questions below to get started.

In your own words, what is the quote about?
What is the tone of the quote?
How do you think each cowboy felt about his job?
Did they enjoy it?
Was it challenging?
Are these quotes what you would expect to hear from a cowboy?

“I loved to ride a steep ledge, view the canyon at sunrise, smell the dewy cedar and hear the mocking birds. I learned to know the trees, shrubs, and flowers in the seasons, and signs and legends belonging to each. The hoot of the owl and howl of the coyote were music to my ears through the long night. My comrade was my horse.”

The Cowboys, Time-Life Books

“I have many times sat upon the fence of a shipping yard and sang to an enclosed herd whilst a train would be rushing by. And it is surprising how quiet the herd will be so long as they can hear the human voice, but if they fail to hear it above the din of the train, a rush is made and the yards burst asunder. Singing hymns to Texan steer is the peculiar forte {skill} of the genuine cowboy.”

Historic Sketches of the Cattle Trade of the West and Southwest, Joseph G. McCoy

“One night on the drive...something startled the herd. Instantly every animal was on its feet and the tramping of flying hoof and rattling horns sounded like artillery...In an instant every man was in the saddle after them. The night was pitch dark and there was nothing to guide us but the thunder of hoofs...Through the rain and mud and pitch dark, up and down banks and over broken ground, they all went in a mad rush, but the boys succeeded in holding the herd...Some were in the saddle twenty-four hours.”

Forty Years on the Frontier, Granville Stuart

Younger Students

Cobblestone Magazine: "America's Cowboys: A History." Peterborough, New Hampshire: Cobblestone Publishing, July 1982.

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McGowen, Tom. Cornerstones of Freedom: African Americans in the Old West. New York: Children's Press, 1998.

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Older Students

Adams, Andy. The Log of a Cowboy. Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1964.

Davy, David. Cowboy Culture. Lawrence, Kansas: University of Kansas Press, 1981.

Hanes, Bailey C. Bill Pickett-Bulldogger. Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1989.

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Russell, Charles M. Trails Plowed Under. Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1927.

Websites

Grant-Kohrs Ranch National Historic Site, Montana

www.nps.gov/grko

Lyndon B. Johnson National Historical Park, Texas

www.nps.gov/lyjo

Theodore Roosevelt National Park, North Dakota

www.nps.gov/thro

The National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum, Oklahoma

<http://cowboykids.nationalcowboymuseum.org>

Frederic Remington Art Museum, New York

www.fredericremington.org

National Cowgirl Museum and Hall of Fame, Texas

www.cowgirl.net